

Sermon on the Mount Study Guide—Week 4; September 30-October 6

Matthew 5:21-37



The Divine Conspiracy

As we saw when we looked at his treatment of the Beatitudes, Dallas Willard forcefully resists the notion that Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount merely replace the Pharisaical legalism of his time with a new, more "Christian" legal line for people to toe. Indeed, Willard argues that actions, in and of themselves, are not what Jesus seeks to change. Rather, he writes, "It is the inner life of the soul that we must aim to transform, and then behavior will naturally and easily follow. But not the reverse. A special term is used in the New Testament to mark the character of the inner life when it is as it should be. This is the term *dikaiosune*" (144).

According to Willard, *dikaiosune*

- i. Willard makes a distinction between anger, which he describes as “a spontaneous response that has a vital function in life” and contempt, which he argues is “a greater evil than anger” (151). Contempt, according to Willard, is the utter despising of someone to the extent that you don’t care one way or another what happens to that person. As such, contempt is dehumanizing another person to such an extent that he or she is worthy of no consideration at all, one way or the other. How does such an understanding affect the way we read Matthew 5:21-26? Might it be that Jesus isn’t arguing against the natural and healthy emotion